1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

197 If the future viability of the myth is open to question, that of the language bond is not. A common language is a bond whose strength can hardly be overestimated; for pervasiveness and necessity no bond can match it. There are dialectical differences, particularly between north and south; a few quite regular sound shifts may cause brief difficulties in communication, and a few words have different meanings or are known only in a particular region. Nevertheless, there is almost complete mutual intelligibility. The Santal themselves are deeply [123] cognizant of language as a basis for intimacy and often indicated to me their desire that I properly learn their language. What little progress I made in this direction was greatly appreciated and always increased the intimacy which the Santal were willing to afford me. The much greater proficiency in Santali that my wife developed allowed her to be more of a Santal than I. As with the origin myth, Santali provides links with the neighboring Mundari-speaking people, though here intelligibility is not always satisfactory.

184 This is not the place to chronicle the numerous ceremonies, 776 rituals, ritual paraphernalia, deities, and religious concepts which the Santal hold in common. Apart from those important deities that belong exclusively to the various social units (house, local lineage, village, and the multi-village *Pargana*), there are a series of closely associated deities that belong to all the Santal. 776 These deities are worshiped in a variety of contexts but their 778 special abode is the "Sacred Grove" (*Jaher*), a clump of trees,* lying just beyond each village. The Sacred Grove is particularly the residence of *Marañ Buru*, a kind of "national spirit of

* These trees are left standing during the initial clearing when the village is established. They are largely *Shorea robusta* (*Sarjom*).

[361] [824]

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
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the Santal" as Culshaw properly describes him.[4] Other "nationally" shared deities of the Grove are *Jaherera*, *Liṭa*, *Gōsāe Era* (Hindi: *Gosain* = pious one), *Mōṛeko* (the Five) and *Tureko* (the Six).[5]

Marañ Buru is regarded as a kind of chief deity, though that honor is sometimes ascribed to Cando (literally "moon," as in Hindi, *chand*) or Siñ-Cando (sun-moon) to Thakur, etc. The great variety of names associated almost haphazardly with the notion of "chief" or "biggest" deity is consistent with the acephalous Santal social structure. Nevertheless the Santal do manifest tribal solidarity, and though every house, local lineage, etc., has its own deities, Marañ Buru always receives his portion of sacrifices, gift offerings and prayer. This constitutes another link between the Santal and other Mundari tribes of the region, who share most of these deities.

Sinha has characterized Indian tribals as conceiving of the good life as one with "ample scope for indulgence in pleasure, while maintaining social obligations to corporate group or groups" (Sinha 1959:309). Culshaw similarly begins his chapter on "Dancing, Music, and Poetry" with the comment that the word "*raṣka* meaning 'pleasure' is often on the lips of the Santal, and it is dear to their hearts."[6] One could hardly begin such a chapter differently, for the traditional sense of the word "pleasure" (*raṣka*) makes it virtually synonymous with dancing

[4] Culshaw, *ibid.*

[5] *Jaherera* is sometimes called *Jaher Budhi* ("Old Lady of the Sacred Grove") and is said to be the consort of Marañ Buru. *Liṭa* is prominent in hunting rites; the rainbow is referred to as the "bow of *Liṭa*." As for the Five and Six, not even the most erudite of the Santal seem to have any knowledge of them other than when they are to receive offerings and prayer.

[6] Culshaw, *ibid.*, 39.

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

626 which are held to be traditional, sacred, and true is a necessary characteristic of a society where leaders voice consensus rather than promulgate edicts and where there is no specialized police force. Perhaps the Santal are as "tradition-directed" as a society may be. This means that weight is given to tradition in making decisions, but it does not mean, as abundant evidence soon to be presented will indicate, that Santal culture is static. It means rather that the "people," like our Supreme Court, must justify their decisions in terms of real or alleged traditional precepts and practices. As our own historical experience indicates, tradition so interpreted and utilized allows for considerable flexibility. Thus it would probably be more accurate to call Santal society (and possibly other societies known for reverence of the traditional) "tradition-justifying," rather than "tradition-directed."

613 621 776 778 The dominance of a particular local lineage in a village is joined with village solidarity, just as the officials of the village are recruited from this lineage. Every village has its "headman's shrine" (*maṇjhithan*); here as at the "Sacred Grove" the deities are represented by unworked stones. The central deity of this shrine is "Oldman Headman" (*Maṇjhi-Haṛam*), who is the spirit of the founding father of the village, i.e., the first headman. At various ceremonies the headman or priest, accompanied by the villagers, makes offerings to Oldman Headman, who is, of course, of their lineage. By contributions to the offerings to Oldman Headman and by various formal and informal gestures, the villagers both acknowledge the authority of their village officials and participate in commemoration of village solidarity.

621 In some contexts village membership and solidarity are paramount. Fellow villagers must worship together on prescribed

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

369 There are a few observations concerning ceremonial practice
796 which apply to all the city Santal (excluding, of course, those who live in town *bustees*). We have seen that the city Santal
[622] are not even a community to the degree that the *bustee* Santal
[778] are; they do not, for the most part, live side-by-side, they have
[793] no headman or priest and they have no Sacred Grove in which to assemble for community worship. The practice of community worship is ruled out for lack of physical facilities, but as we have seen from our examination of the *bustee*, there is little reason to think that their presence would be sufficient to maintain ceremonial practice and participation at the level obtained in rural villages.

342 What is most striking about the city Santal is that they do
369 not practice ancestor worship in their Company houses. Their
769 explanation of this, with a little elaboration, appears to me to be an adequate one. They say, "Who knows whose houses these were before we got here—they are not our houses. That
[192] is why we do not worship here." It will be recalled that ancestor worship is performed behind a wall dividing off a portion of the main room of the house and known as "inside" (*bhitar*; Santali and Hindi = "inside"). The same word is used to refer to secret rites and deities of a family and of a local lineage, i.e., when a question touches on such things they will say you are asking an "inside" question. It will also be recalled that this "inside" portion of the house must be guarded against pollution by menstruating women. Since it is not permissible to erect such a wall within a company house, again physical facilities in the city render traditional practice difficult. But more than the particular difficulty of lack of a wall, there is a
[783] general question of pollution. Not only does the company house not provide a proper sanctuary for the "inside" rites of

2: Skrefsrud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

539 (migrated) to the seven-river land Campa[23]. There were two passes, one Cae pass and the other the Campa pass.

In Campa they built a great many forts in order to ensure that enemies should not be able to overcome them. One was the Khạiri fort; this was the fort of the Hẹmbrọm people; one was the Kọeṇḍa fort; this belonged to the Kisku people. One was the Campa fort; this belonged to the Murmus. One was the Badoli fort; this belonged to the Mạrṇḍis; and one was the Sim fort; this belonged to the Ṭuḍu people. There were still other forts; but we have forgotten the names.

In Campa we stayed for ages, and there we were a great people. At that time we were not subordinate to anybody. The "kings" (rulers) were persons of the Kisku sept. The Murmus were from olden times our priests; we call them Murmu Ṭhạkur. The Sọrẹns were peons; they were fighters. The Hẹmbrọms were the nobility, the Mạrṇḍis were the wealthy class, and the Ṭuḍus were drumming the dancing- and the kettle-drums, and they were making all kinds of things of iron. The Baske people were buying and selling (merchants). What special work those belonging to the remaining septs had, we do not remember.

Having settled in Campa they placed Maraṅ buru, the Five-Six and the Jahẹr era[24] in a sacred grove at the end of the village-street and were worshipping them. The Day-spirit they worshipped at sun-rise every fifth year.

Our ancestors of old have, people say, told, that in olden times, when Ram raja was living, at that time all Kharwar people went with him to Loṅka (Ceylon) and helped him to vanquish Rabona raja; for this reason from then on for a very long time we had no fighting or anything of this kind with the Dekos[25]. They were living in the plains and we in the forests and on the hills. But afterwards we got very much fighting with the Dekos; until this day we have no happy relations with them. As soon as we have cleared the jungle in any country, the Dekos come and rob us of it. Still if the Sahibs[26] nowadays did not help them, we should soon drive them to the other side of the Ganges. At the time of the insurrection[27] we had intended to make the Ganges our boundary; but

[823] [114] [778] [829] [671] [175] [669]

[23] It is not possible with any certainty to identify the countries mentioned. Skrefsrud thought that the expression "the country of the seven rivers" might be identified with the present Punjab. Others will identify Cae Campa with the country to the northwest of the present Chota Nagpur. As regards the last mentioned, the same name might have reference to two different countries. [24] lit. The Lady of the Sacred Grove. Every Santal village is to have a sacred grove (jahẹr) in its vicinity, where possible, a part of the original forest, consisting of sal-trees and at least one Mahua tree. More further on. [25] Deko is the name used by the Santals for a non-Santal of the better class, especially Hindus. A Mohammedan will not be so called, if he is recognized as a Mohammedan. [26] i.e., the European courts. The Santal's ideas of justice are not regulated by written laws. [27] The Santal insurrection of 1855, was not aimed against the Government of the day, but was a misguided attempt to get rid of the money-lenders. The Government naturally had to intervene. This insurrection marks the beginning of a new era for the Santals, according to their own estimation in many ways a beginning of deterioration. The mention of the insurrection here is an anticipation.

2: Skrefsrud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

of the villagers will become wealthy. In the directions in which the rats have carried off rice, in so many directions it will be necessary to bring up bongas. If the water in the narrow-mouthed pot has dwindled a little, they say about this: A couple of years we shall have a scarcity of water. And if the water has not dwindled at all, they say: We shall not have any scarcity of water. If the fowls have disappeared, if there is no rice, and the water in the narrow-mouthed pot has dried up, they say: This place is ill-fated; and they leave it; they will not found a village there. 361 787

But if there are good omens from the fowls, the rice and the water in the narrow-mouthed pot, then they dig a small four-cornered hole. On three sides of this they put the dug-out earth. With this earth they again fill the hole up. If it is filled with the earth on two sides, they say: We shall get full crops here; and if no earth is left (in filling the hole), they say: It is inauspicious here. Thereupon they seek omens in another high place inside the boundary that they have walked up, and in the name of another village headman. They continue to act in this way, until they get full good omens. They ultimately get this.

b. On settling down.

Now one day they return and make a shelter of sticks leaning against each other, for the leader. He, the leader, who is to become the headman of the village, cuts down the first tree. Nowadays, after they have investigated the forest, they ask the landowner for permission; formerly, before landowners made their appearance, there was nothing of this kind. 361

Together with the leader they now divide between themselves the homestead fields. On their respective homestead fields they each put up a hut for themselves, and each a pen to keep their cattle in. Thereupon they go back to their old homes and call on each other saying: When shall we start? They then take their children and all they possess with them and go to the new village. The time of moving is the months of Phalgun and Chait (middle of Febr. to middle of April). Now all of them clear the jungle for the homestead fields, and the trees they have cut down also serve them for house-timber. Any remaining timber, etc., they burn away. They build houses. Running along the middle of the place they keep a village street, and at the end of this they arrange a sacred grove. [178]

c. Bringing up the bongas in the sacred grove.

To bring the bongas up in the sacred grove they get three to four men who are to become possessed[1]. They come together at the village headman's. The headman pours out water for the persons to be possessed, that they may wash. The men to be possessed then wash their feet and sprinkle water on their head. Thereupon they sit down in a row beside each 782 776

[1] See Dictionary s. v. ram.

their enemies, the Santals built many forts at Campa. 173
The one named Khàiri gaṛ belonged to the Hèmbròm clan. Koeṇḍa gaṛ fort was meant for the Kiskus. The fourth fortress, named Badoli gaṛ, sheltered the Màrṇḍis, while Sim gaṛ was occupied by the Ṭuḍus.

The early Santals lived at Campa for many generations. They became a great people there, and were independent of others' control. Their kings belonged to the Kisku clan. The Murmus were the priests. They were called Murmu Ṭhàkur. The Sòrèn clan supplied the warriors. Their profession was fighting only. Hembròms were "Kunàr" (the nobility, according to well-informed opinion). The clan known as the Màrṇḍis were rich men. They were the money-lenders. The Ṭuḍus worked as the musicians and smiths of the tribe, while the Baskes were the traders. The duties of the other clans are now forgotten.

The sojourn of the Santals at Campa is important for the fact that here they began to worship the various tribal deities. We hear that they built shrines in sacred groves situated at the end of the village "kulhi" (lanes) and began to worship Maraṅ Buru (*big-mountain*, the chief presiding deity), Mònṛènko (*fives*) and Jahèr era (*old-woman*). Siñ-Boṅga (*the sun-god*) was worshipped every fifth year at sun-rise.

173
776
[778]

31 Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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cordifolia), Pipal (*Ficus religiosus, Willd*), Palas (*Butea frondosa*) lac-bearing Kusum (*Schleichera trijuga*) are the flora here to be seen in profusion.

Of these, the most predominant and characteristic tree to the Santal areas is the Sal, called *Sarjom* by them, and its distribution is general. It is a tree yielding a hard timber, straight and tall and shining with glossy leaves. It is holy with them, and with it they make their Jahèrthan, (*Holy Grove*). Such straggling clusters of Sal trees are found all over the countryside near Santal hamlets. The Sal serves them the same purpose as the bamboo to the rest of the population. With its leaves they make leaf-cups and plates and its timber invariably goes to their house-building. More useful is the Mohua. Its flower contains sugar and is therefore sweet to eat and nutritious too. The Santal preserves it as food by drying it in the sun and it serves them well for months to come. It serves the same purpose as the mango and the jack-fruit to the rest of the population, who during those seasons take them as their chief diet. The pulp of the fruit is eaten and its kernel yields an oil which is chiefly used by the tribe for their culinary purposes.

March and April are months of joy for the Santal like the Cherry-blossom season in Japan. The Mohua and Sal trees are then in full blossom with their whitish flowers. In the early morning one sees

31 Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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dangers visiting the tribe. In the background of their minds, they are not imbued by any moral feelings or any sense of tribal aristocracy. Some think that in case of such transgression, the gods in their ire will send drought and famine and pestilence in the place thus visited by sin as it is an insult to them. But when one analyses the behaviour of the Santal masses, when they receive news of prohibited sexual congress and the collective indignation they give vent to as a reaction, one is led to believe that the Santal's almost "instinctive fear of such defilement has behind it also the sub-conscious and, to all appearances, instinctive fear of a mysterious dangerous power of the nature of *mana* infecting the erring woman and her family and calculated to prove contaminating and destructive as death."[1]

Santal Customary Law

We have seen in the foregoing pages that the village-council is the repository of Santal tribal law concerning succession and inheritance. It is therefore necessary for us to give the reader some idea of the law on the subject.

Generally speaking, all the sons of a Santal have equal shares of inheritance in the properties left by their deceased father. The daughter has no right

1. The Kharias. Page 177. Rai Bahadur S. C. Roy.

Si Mukherjea O. Y-4, 8 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

796 will their women wear them in their hair. As distinguished from the *Sobrae*, the Harvest Home, which is a trifle Bacchanalian, this festival is purer in its observances.

796 783 778 The festival begins with a day of purification called *Um*, when the young men of the village assemble at the *Jahèrthan*, (the Holy-Grove) in the village, and build two huts. One of these huts is [776] reserved for the Santal deity, called Gosane era, the other is meant to be jointly shared by Jahèr era, the presiding deity of the grove, "Monrènko", (the "Five", meaning the five presiding gods) and Maraṅ Buru, the chief presiding deity. The shrines thus built are then purified with cow-dung by the priest. All the young men of the village then bathe and purify themselves.

796 [793] [783] In the meantime, the *Nacke* (priest) cleanses a winnowing fan, a basket, a bow and arrow, a pick-axe, a broom-stick, a holy gong and a hunting-horn and daub them with oil and *mithi* (a kind of spice).

[624] The evening comes. In the meantime, the *Godet*, the orderly of the village Headman, has presented him (the priest) with three fowls. Three [787] young men now advance towards the priest's house, shaking their heads in a trance and impersonating Jahèr era, Maraṅ Buru and Gosane era respectively. Jahèr era then enters the priest's hut, puts on the bracelet, and putting the basket on his head, takes

31 Mukherjee O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

796 533 [539] thus in the first few stanzas:—(*translated*).

Semi-chorus:

On the Pipul tree, the wood-pecker is twittering,
Under the banyan tree, the *gutrut* is singing.
Has the Spring arrived?

Second semi-chorus answers:

[539] The seasons have changed, so the wood-pecker twitters;
The Spring has come back so the *gutrut* babbles.
The Spring has come back to us.

796 [526] The second day's programme, which includes the shooting at *sal*-flowers, is the most picturesque. Early in the morning, the priest's wife grinds flour. The Headman's orderly goes round the village gathering rice, salt and turmeric. All then go to the Holy Grove singing all the way. The priest carries a big basket containing a chain, bracelets, broom-stick, bows, arrows and horns; and a smaller one with rice, oil, vermilion, flour and pick-axe. [778] A small holy-water pot is conveyed there by a bachelor youth.

Here, the actor-deities of the previous day are again inspired. They wear their traditional insignia and run to the jungles, followed by the young men. There, Mòṇṛènko shoots at the sprouting *sal*-flowers with an arrow, Maraṅ Buru climbs the tree and cuts

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,8 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

The customary practices, in connection with the *Pata*, vary in different areas. There are some in the Santal Parganas who show signs of supposed spirit-possession (the Santal *jhupar*) with the arrival of the festival. They go here and there like Tagore's maniac (*'khepa'*) in eternal search for the "touch-stone." They dive in a pond, ransack the forests, search the hills, and at last coming upon a stone shout, "Eureka" ("We have found."). And the admiring audience see that they have unearthed a stone, which they all acclaim as the symbol of *Mahadeo*. These people, called *Bhòktas*, then run to the conveners of the Hindu festival *Còròk* and prevail upon them to worship the images ceremonially, and if listened to, they are permitted to join with the devotees and take part in the ceremonials.

There are others who arrange their own festivals. Such people go begging from house to house for three days previous, and with the proceeds, they buy milk. Then on the eve of the *Pata*, they assemble at a field, where the *Bhòktas* (devotees) erect a hut-temple with subscriptions collected from the tribe; and offer milk, rice and *ghee* to the deity *Mahadeo* with a good deal of ceremony, a goat being sacrificed in a place away from the improvised temple. The ceremonials conclude with special songs and dances in which the Santals take part with a great deal of gusto.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1982
AW42 Santal AW42

The chief presiding deity of the Santals is "Maraṅ Buru." ('Maraṅ' means great, and 'Buru,' hill). Literally, he is the Great Mountain of the Santal traditions, noted in the first chapter. It is said that he possesses the widest possible powers and is associated both with good and mischievous godlings. He must be offered a white fowl, and if a goat is offered, it too must be white and uncastrated. He should be propitiated with a liberal offer of rice-beer during all Santal festivals, and birth, death and marriage ceremonies in the tribe.

Another village-deity is "Mòntènko Turuiko" (Lit. the five-six), who is now a single entity, but addressed in the plural (the suffix *ko* indicates plurality). The Santals believe that they were five brothers (Mòntèn = five) who were wedded to six sisters named Dangi, Pungi, Hisi, Dumni, Chita and Kapra. (Turui = six). They are supposed to preside over the welfare of the village. His younger sister, "Gosane era," constitutes a separate deity of the *Jahèrthan* (Holy Grove), and is offered worship in a different hut. "Jahèr era," another sister of "Mòntènko" is the goddess of *Jahèrthan* (Holy Grove) named after her. She has a stone assigned as her symbol. The Santals woship her for the general welfare of the village, so that their children may have good health, crops may grow in plenty and youths and maids of the tribe may be

31 Mukherjea Ó. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1937) 1902
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MAYURBHANJ

776 married quickly. For propitiation, she needs a
[782] brown hen (*Herak' Sim*); and if a goat is sacrificed in her honour, it must be a red she-goat.

776 In course of our investigations at Mayurbhanj,
778 we were shown stones in the *Jabèrthan* (Holy Grove)
346 which were supposed to represent these deities. During all public festivals, huts are raised to worship them suitably. It was stated that in Mayurbhanj three huts are raised ; one to house "Jahèr era," "Maraṅ Buru" and "Mòṇtrènko," a second for "Gosane era," and the third for another village deity, "Mañjhi Haṛam." But there are instances when a fourth one is insisted on by younger folk, to honour the younger brother of Mañjhi, called "Hudiñ Mañjhi Haṛam." In our references to the
[184] practice in the Santal Parganas (e.g. *Baha*, Santal Sal-blossom festival) we have seen that only "Jahèr era," "Gosane era," "Maraṅ Buru," and "Mòṇtrènko" have huts for them in the Holy Grove. Mañjhi has his place no doubt, but he is worshipped at the *Mañjhithan*, a separate shrine in the village.

776 As a matter of fact Mañjhi Boṅga may be
[775] supposed to represent the spirits of dead Mañjhis (village Headman). But he is only second to another dignitary, "Pargana," who has power over witches.
[184] Both of these are village-deities, although they may not find a place in the *Jabèrthans* of Mayurbhanj Santals.

31 Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

Hill-Spirit hast thou come here?, To what order (of spirits) dost thou belong?. Answer questions. Then, O deity! we shall spread a wooden-seat (or stone-seat) for thee." 755 782 787 539

The men in trance reply:—"Hinsaha (very well I am answering)."

Next follows an answer giving the name of the *Orak' Bonga*. The householder then prays, "So and so is ill; he is being treated by so and so. Do please help the doctor to cure the disease. If the patient recovers, I shall offer you this (fowls, rams or goats)".

The men in trance now give appropriate answers, as to what god to propitiate, with what offerings and when, or may suggest other ways and means to get rid of the calamity. 755 782 787

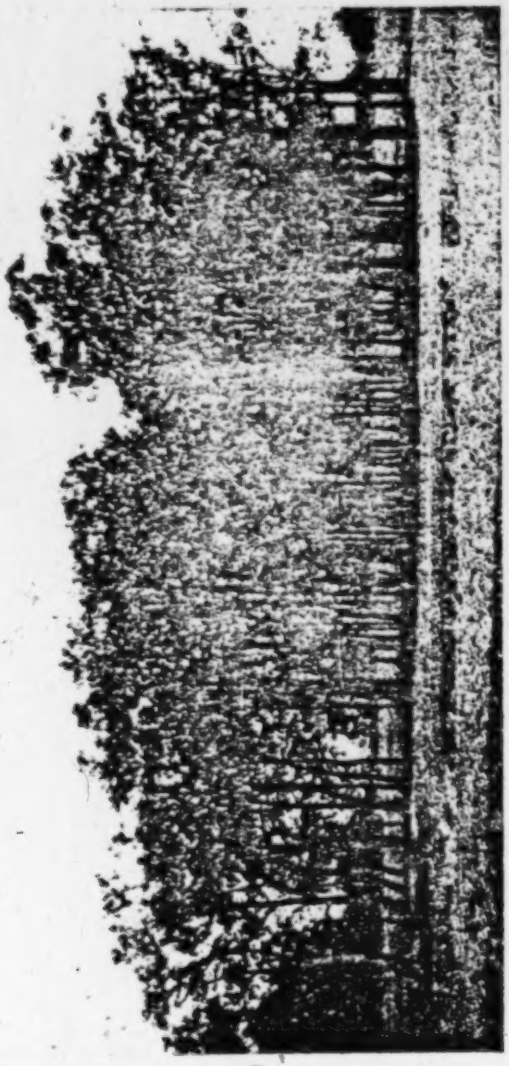
This prayer is offered at the door of the room (Bhitar duar), which is considered holy as the abode of the household deity. This room is not open to strangers, and even members of the house can enter this only after a ceremonial purification. If the disease is serious, villagers are called, and *Jhupar* takes place to find out the appropriate remedy. [778] [783]

Belief in Evil Eye

Like the other aboriginal tribes of the Central Belt, the Santals believe in women possessing a malevolent eye, that can bring ruin on people by 754

3: Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

• 778



Jaherthan (Holy Grove)

[Page 275]
Photo : Mayurbhanj State

[End Plate 10]

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

CHAPTER II

Material Culture of the Santal.

The Village : The Santal villages with their houses on both sides of the street are situated on the plains. These villages are not well fortified. In each village only one unpaved avenue can be found, the width of which is about twenty five to thirty feet and the length is equal to the length of the village. There are tall trees at intervals on both sides of the avenue which make the path shady. In a big village generally twenty to thirty houses can be seen and in a small village there are only ten to twelve houses. In each village a Majhisthan is built, where Kulidrupe[1] (Panchayat) takes place and taxes are collected by the head-man of the village, and there the Manjhi Haram (head-man) worships the Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Burhi. In almost every village a Jahersthan can be found which is nothing but a cluster of Sal (Shorea robusta) trees where the Santals worship their village deities. The water supply of the village is derived from a streamlet which runs nearby. The Santal villages are very neat and clean and all the villagers take particular care to keep it so, and scavenging is done by the pigs and dogs which help in keeping the village neat. As soon as the houses have all been erected and the village established, some trees such as mango, jack-fruit etc. are planted ; the Satals[2] have a belief that these trees bring prosperity. The Headman's house is generally built more or less in the centre of the village and close to the Majhisthan. The villages are generally known by their place names as Sunderpahari, Chandna, etc.

361 [363] 344 346 651 622 778 312 364 231 245 622 342 103

[1 Erratum: i.e., kulidrup. 2 Erratum: i.e., Santal. -- Analyst]

4; Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

361 The Santals observe certain omens before selecting the site for the village. Below are mentioned a few which are mainly based on what an old Santal guru known as 'Kolean guru' related to the late Rev. L. O. Skrefsurd about ninety years ago.

About half a dozen Santals go inside a forest with a leader to select a site for their village. If they see any of three kinds of quails (a genus of gallinaceous birds to which the domestic fowl belongs) flying over there they say :

"Some day in the future a village founded here will be deserted".

But if they see these birds hatching their eggs or if they come across a tiger on their way or see marks of its paws on the ground they say :

"Some day in the future a village founded here will thrive and become prosperous and we can stay here contentedly".

361 In selecting the site for the village, the Santals are very particular about the following things :—

The ground should not be damp and there should be enough good highland for fields and homestead. There should be enough land for cultivation and water should be readily available.

In a Santal village two things are very important, one is the Mahajhisthan, the place made for the spirit of the original headman, and the other is the Jahersthan, the scared grove where the Santals worship the Bongas.

The Majhisthan : The Majhisthan or raised platform is an important place for the Santals. They build this place generally, in the centre of the village, near the

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
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Manjhi Haram's (headman) house. On it taxes are collected by the Manjhi Haram and legal disputes are settled. There is no fixed size for the Majhisthan. It is found that the Santals, in different villages make Majhisthans of different dimensions. In a village there was a Majhisthan ten feet long, eight feet broad and two and half feet in height while in another was one five feet long, four feet broad and one foot high. It consists of a raised mud mound over which a neatly thatched roof is constructed. The roof is supported by five upright wooden posts in the four corners of the Majhisthan and one in the centre. At the base of the centre post is stuck a small stone or wooden lump (sometimes shaped as a human head) daubed with vermilion. From the roof an earthen pot is suspended containing water brought from the Jahirsthan for the spirits to drink and beside it hangs a peacock's head. The floor of the Majhisthan is plastered with mud and cowdung.

The Jahirsthan (Sacred Grove): The Jahirsthan is a place where religious ceremonies of the village are performed by the Santals. It is situated at the end of the village and it must be within the boundary of the village. A cluster of sal trees about twenty to twenty-five in number is always required. Among these trees three are essential, and at the foot of each of these three trees a stone is put representing the deities, Jaherera, Turukomonrako, Marang-Buru. The fourth one is an Ashan tree which grows near these three sal trees and at the foot of this tree a stone representing the deity Pargana-bonga is kept. The fifth and the last one is a Mowa tree, which stands a little apart, and at the foot of this tree, a stone is placed to represent

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798 824 Gosainera, a female deity. This Mowa tree is known as the Lady of the Grove. But it was noticed in the Jahirsthan both in Dumka and Godda area, that at the base of several other Sal trees there were stones which represented the Pukri and other Bongas.

342 782 825 [782] **The House :** Before constructing the house they test the site by tying a rooster on the site for five days, and if within these five days the cock loses its life they give up the place thinking it to be undesirable. If the rooster remains alive they begin the construction of the house after sacrificing a fowl to Marang Buru.

342 782 Before entering the new house the owner of the house brings a mug of water after bathing in a stream nearby and pours a little water in each room. In the room facing east the owner puts three cups of Sal leaves on the floor and pours "Handi" (rice beer) in those cups taking the name of Marang Buru and Pilchu Haram and utters the following words :—

"I have constructed the house by taking your names. See that every thing remains alright".

342 [351] [245] [784] Mango and jackfruit trees are planted in the adjoining field in the belief that prosperity will come. During the house ceremony widows and divorced women cannot enter the house.

The house and its contents : The house of the Santals is not of varied design and the plan of the main structure is always the same. In some can be found a courtyard in the centre, and rooms on two sides and mud walls on the other two sides. An average house of the Santals measures 15 to 18 feet in the length and 10 to 12 feet in width.

In the Daminikoh area and outside this area of the Santal Parganas two types of houses can be seen.

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342 ventilation except a few holes high up on the wall. In front of the house the eaves of the roof are elongated which serves as a covered verandah. The floor of the house is a little raised above the ground, being filled up with earth. This is trampled down hard and made smooth with mud mixed with cowdung.

342 Every Santal house in which the head of the
778 family lives has a 'Bhitar'. This is a part of a room
769 partitioned by a low wall which runs out from the side wall some six to nine feet into the com-
[609] partment. It is a kind of stall, and is sacred to the ancestors. Here food is kept for the ancestors and no
[784] stranger is permitted inside. The married daughter of the house, who in her girlhood was allowed entry is now not permitted inside, because she now belongs to another family and might cause religious pollution.

343 There is a separate shed for cattle. Within this
231 shed in some houses special arrangement is made to keep pigs. In one corner of the cattle-shed two mud-walls about three feet in height are built, to form a small rectangular sty. Over it bamboo sticks and branches of trees are placed, so that pigs cannot escape by jumping. A hole is made in one of the walls and bamboo sticks are placed there in such a way that by raising these sticks the pigs can easily come out and enter. But in some villages in the Godda Damin are found the pig-sheds built outside the house. In this case the walls of about 5 feet and the roof are made of thatch.

342 Inside the house on the verandah the "Dhenk" 3
252 (rice-husker) is fixed and a mill-stone is kept. Except
351 during cold season, when the inside is warm, the
[407] Santals generally stay outside on the courtyard both day
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[Erratum: this should read "'Dhenki'" . Cf. errata sheet, category 116, p. ix -- Analyst]

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describes that Thakur Baba had made everything very convenient for mankind, etc. Rev. Bodding, who is the most recent and exhaustive worker on Santal beliefs and customs specially in the Mohulpaharia area in Santal Parganas, gives the name as Chando, 'the creator, the only one who gives and restores life' (Studies in Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore). Bodding further says that this name is often confounded with Cando the Sun. My own personal enquiries in the villages in Katikund within Dumka Damin and in the village on the base of the Zalway Hill, in Deoghar Sub-division, in the year 1934, elicited the information that the general name for God is Kando and the name for the Sun in that area is Sin Kando and for the moon Ninda Kando.

The Santal lives in harmony with the surroundings, having no temple and stooping to no idol made by his hand for the purpose of worship. It may be said that the Santal lives like a child of nature in rapport with all his surroundings, the hill, the dale, the spring or the grove being the objects of his reverential fear. They are the abodes of a supreme supernatural energy or the departmental spirits or the bongas. The bongas are friendly beings at times, but most often mischievous and naughty elves playing mischievous pranks with men, bringing them trouble and causing misery at times. These bongas are supposed at times to harass humanity, to eat people (as the Santals express it) because they are hungry, displeased, hurt or envious, and this eating is the devouring of health and substance of the person exposed to the displeasure of the spirits. The spirits may further be used by, or themselves use, the witches as medium.

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family, the whole of it will be exterminated if the *Kisar bonga* is not effectually sent away from the house.

9. The last to be grouped are the spirits or rather mysterious powers residing in or connected with certain objects such as battle-axe (*Kapi Karan bonga* and *Bhalus Bijai bonga*. *Bhalu* is most likely a shortened form of *Bhalua Kapi*, the name of a common form of their battle-axe), and some weird natural objects such as an abnormally gnarled bamboo-shoot, tree-roots, some weird-looking fantastic-shaped hills or a roaring cataract, a waterfall or a tank-side. These spirits are not objects of worship nor do they receive sacrifices but are mischievous spirits who have to be scared away or exorcised by the *ojha* (spirit-doctor).

Santal religious ceremonies :

The Santals have no temple nor any shed for worship but they have a *Sthan* (place) known as *Jahirsthan* where they worship the village deities. The *Jahirsthan* is a place where religious ceremonies of the village are performed by the Santals. It is situated at the end of the village and it must be within the boundary of the village. It should consist of trees belonging to the primeval forest. A cluster of sal trees about twenty to twenty-five in number, is always required. Among these trees three are essential and they must stand in a row. At the base of each of these three trees a small stone is placed representing the deities *Jaherera*, *Truko Muruko*, *Marang-Buru*. The fourth is an Ashan tree which grows anywhere near those three sal trees, and a stone is put on its base representing the diety *Pargana Bonga*. The fifth and

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778 the last is a Mowah tree; on its foot a stone representing the deity *Gosain Era* is kept. This is the most important one and is known as Lady of the Grove.

296 241 In the Santal villages there is a succession of festivals throughout the year, nearly all connected with agricultural operations. The chief of these is the *Sohras* or *Banda parab* or the harvest festival, celebrated in the Bengali month Pous (i.e., at the beginning of the month of January) after the rice crop of the year has been harvested. This festival generally lasts for five days. Previously there was no fixed date, villagers of one locality performing this festival one day, others performing on some other day. But now-a-days the [178] [211] Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas fixes the date for this festival, and this date is proclaimed by a man with a *sal* branch in his hand in every *hut*. Before this *parab*, Santal women buy large earthen vessels and replace old ones which they bought in the previous year. When the day has been fixed all houses prepare "handia" (rice beer) and people invite their relatives. [793] [784] [834] [624] The night before the festival commences, the *Naiks* is religiously-abstinent for before any sacrifice the sacrificer must not have relations with a woman and should sleep on the ground on a mat. At day break the *goddet* goes round and collects sacrificial fowls from every house. In the middle of the forenoon the [793] [982] *Naiks* goes near a tank together with some of the village people, the *goddet* taking the fowls with him. The *Naiks* bathes and then sacrifices the fowls to the different *bongas* after which the villagers cook the fowls with rice and eat them, and also drink rice beer. After this the villagers go to *Kulimucha* (i.e.,

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Baha Parab. Next in importance is the *Baha parab* which is held in the Bengali month Phalgun (February-March). This festival takes place when the sal trees (shorea robusta) begin to flower. *Baha* is a Santali word which means flower. The purpose of holding this festival is that the new year is well commenced. Drinking, dancing and singing go on in this festival also. The festival takes place in the *Jahersthan* and the *Naike* and *Kudum Naike* worship in the *Jahersthan*. On the first day of the festival the young people of the village build two sheds in *Jahersthan*, one for *Jaher-era*, *Turuko Moreko* and *Marang Buru* and the other for *Gosain era*. The *sthans* are cleaned by plastering with cowdung. Then they go to bathe and oil several articles (winnowing fan, basket, bow and arrows, battle-axe, broom, a wristlet, a necklace and bell and horn of a buffalo which they call *sakua*) which are to be used next day, when three persons become possessed by the three first bongas mentioned above. The whole night is spent in drumming at the house of the *Naike*, where all assemble with *bongas* (the persons who will be possessed with bongas are called *bongas*). Jaher-era is a female diety and a man who is possessed with this *bonga* takes the ornaments, the basket and the broom; *Moreka* takes the bow and arrow and *Marang Buru* carries the battle-axe. With these articles they start running for the *Jahersthan* followed by the boys who carry drums cymbals, bugle and bull-roarer. On arriving at the *Jahersthan*, *Jaher-era* sweeps the place; the *Naike* asks the *bongas* (i.e., those who are possessed with the deities) for the things they have brought and places them on a mat. He then asks them questions

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796 [787] about the happenings of the coming year. The *Naike* then washes the *bongas* and throws the surplus water over them, whereupon the *bongas* jump up howling. Then they return home.

796 Next day they again go to the *Jahersthan*. When
• 798 they see a fine *sal* tree in bloom, *Moreka* shoots an arrow into it, while *Marang Buru* climbs it and cuts down the flowering branches, *Jahar-era* receiving the flowers in a basket. On the road *Marang Buru* gathers mowah blossoms. In the *Jahersthan* the *bongas* are 796 again placed on a mat under the shed, and the *Naike*, 798 sitting in front of them, sacrifices the fowls, and places a 793 bunch of flowers with a mowah flower before each *bonga*. [782] The *bongas* suck the blood of the fowls, whereupon the *Naike* washes their feet. *Jahar-era* doing the same to the *Naike*. The *Naike*, together with his wife who is now brought to the *Jahersthan* for the purpose, eats one of the fowls cooked with rice; some of the villagers eat the rest in the *Jahersthan*. After this all leave, except the *Naike* who remains alone in [782] the *Jahersthan*. The villagers then proceed to sacrifice fowls and pigs in their own houses, and to eat and drink. In the afternoon they go to the *Jahersthan* to bring the *Naike* back and the rest of the day is spent in general merry making. The women also enjoy to their heart's content.

24 The Santals perform several festivals before sowing
796 seeds and also after reaping when they offer the first fruits to the village deities.

[778] **Erok-Puja**: This festival they perform before sowing seeds in the newly ploughed field. They celebrate it in

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the *Jahersthan* in the month of Asadh (June-July). *Naike* and his assistant *Kudum Naike* perform the function. Five fowls are sacrificed in the *Jahersthan*. After the function they cook these fowls and eat them. the heads of the fowls are taken by the *Naike* and *Kudum Naike*.

Hariar Sim: The Santals hold this festival at the time of the sprouting of rice, which takes place in the month of Sraban (July-August). Fowls are sacrificed to all the tribal and village deities and prayers are offered for a bountiful harvest.

Janthar Puja (Nawai) This festival is held in the month of Agrahayan (November-December) in the *Jahersthan* when the first gathering of the winter rice crop is offered Similarly the first gathering of the millets is offered in the sacred grove in the month of Bhadra (August-September) which the Santals call Irigrudli-nawai. The *Naike* reaps a little of the crop and offers to the village deities in the *Jahersthan*, and ties a twig round the five trees of the *Jahersthan* The *Naike* at the time of uttering prayer pours some milk on the offerings. Similar offerings are made by each householder of the village to the spirits of their ancestors.

Mak' More: This festival is observed by the Santals generally at intervals of five years or so in the *Jahersthan* as a result of vows made at times of distress or epidemics. Fowls are sacrificed and a white goat is sacrificed in the name of the village community to *Mokrsko*, one of the five deities of Santals which they worship in the *Jahersthan*. The flesh of the sacrified

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793 practice of making an offering of his own blood is followed by
782 the magician[1] when he is attempting to cure sickness. While the function of the priest is to deal with the tribal spirits, it would seem that his co-priest has to propitiate relatively unknown and fearful spirits; one might almost describe him as a kind of "minister for foreign affairs" in relation to the spirit world.

• 778 Santal worship centres round its sacred places, the most
824 prominent of which is the *jaher*, the sacred grove usually to the west of the village. It consists of a number of tall, slim *sarjom* trees with perhaps one or two trees of other varieties, the whole having been left standing since the village was first founded. The surrounding forests have been cut down to form land for cultivation and for the homesteads, so the grove stands out
[184] from the landscape. Apart from festival occasions there is usually little to show the sacredness of the place, but the practice varies greatly from village to village. Two of the tallest
778 trees standing side by side are thought to be the abodes of
776 *Marañ Buru*, the national spirit of the Santals, and of his
824 female consort *Jaher Budhi*, the Old Lady of the Sacred Grove. At the side of the former tree one sometimes discerns the blackened stones of the fireplace at which the village priest cooks – apart from the rest of the village—his share of the offerings. Other relics of festivals may be found, such as an ear of paddy still attached to its stalk, tied round one of the trees and left there since the time of the offering of first-fruits. Sometimes there are semi-permanent posts in the ground near the more sacred trees, two in front of the trees and two at the back, with cross-pieces joining them to form the framework on which a temporary thatch is placed during the festivals over the place where the sacrifices are performed. One of the trees is the abode of the "Five and Six", and near it a post standing in the ground represents the place of one *Laga Thakur*, who acts as their
[264] watchman. Removed to a little distance is the place where the food of the villagers is cooked: the meals eaten here are communal. There are other trees at which the *kudam naeke* makes his blood offering to the boundary spirits, and these are indicated during the festivals by means of a piece of string. In some villages one finds indications of places at the edge of the grove at which one or other of the sub-clans performs its sacrifices. In some groves the space at the foot of the principal trees is tended carefully as befits a shrine. The ground is cleared and plastered regularly with cowdung and water, a cactus hedge is planted to

[1] The *ojha*. See Chapter 8, pp. 94 ff.

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keep away marauding cattle and goats, and large earthen effigies of elephants and horses are set in position as worthy mounts for the spirits. The grove is not usually much more than a hundred yards away from the westernmost house in the village, but sometimes one finds that the dwellings of the people have been moved owing to sickness or some other reason and the grove remains in its original site. The determination of the site of the grove is an important element in founding a new village. Naturally there are few opportunities for observing the process at the present time, but the tradition is kept alive among the Santals, who tell that the choice of the site is made by the spirits themselves. They do so by taking possession of certain of the villagers and expressing their wishes through them. These men take stones and place them at the foot of three *sarjom* trees, which should be in a row, two for *Maraṅ Buru* and *Jaher Budhi* close together, and the third for the "Five and Six". Other trees are then set apart for a second female spirit known as *Gōsāē Era*, and also for the *pargana boṅga* and the boundary spirits.

Maraṅ Buru is the spirit who possesses the most clearly defined individuality. The name means "Great Mountain", but it is interesting to note that the word *buru* means not only a mountain but is also used for spirits in general, especially when it is coupled with the more usual *boṅga*. The use of *buru* combined with *boṅga* suggests that *buru* originally meant "mountain", that it was then used for "mountain spirit" and then as a synonym for *boṅga*. Another name for *Maraṅ Buru* is *Liṭa*, which is a proper name and does not appear to refer to any attributes. The name *Liṭa* is frequently used in stories and also in conversation, but it is not used in invocations. The Santal name for a rainbow is the "bow of *Liṭa*". *Maraṅ Buru* is invoked on all occasions when offerings are made, and he is a complete sharer in all the fortunes of the tribe, good and evil. He seems to be regarded as a kindly but capricious old gentleman. The references to him in the mythology clearly indicate his dominant position. He appeared on the scene at a very early stage in the life of the first pair. He found them living in a state of innocence and told them that they had not yet learnt to taste the joys of life. After introducing himself to them as their grandfather and so establishing an intimate relationship between himself and them, he taught them how to brew beer and left them for a few days. When he returned he chuckled to see the change in their appearance, for during his absence they had become drunken.

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In that condition they had for the first time experienced sexual intercourse and, realizing their nakedness, they had clothed themselves. He taught them that they must always offer beer to him when they invoked his name.

The Old Lady of the Sacred Grove, *Jaher Budhi*, is by contrast a shadowy person. Bodding reports[1] that her name is said to be *Ram sąlgi*, but except for the fact that offerings are made to her along with those made to *Maraṅ Buru* at festivals, little is known about her. The same may be said of the "Five and Six", who are thought of as a family of five brothers and one sister. It is only to the "Five" that offerings are made, and hence they are also frequently referred to as the "Five." One sacrifice suffices for them all. The "Five" are greatly feared because they are likely to cause some swift calamity when they are displeased.

The *Mąṅjhi than*, the shrine of the spirits of the departed headmen, is the second of the sacred places in which the cult of the tribe is localized. The site is supposed to be fixed in much the same manner as that of the sacred grove. Local legends grow up round these shrines, and they exhibit many variations. Often they are situated somewhere near the centre of the village, to one side of the main street. In some instances the shrine consists of a raised mud platform over which there is a well-kept thatched roof supported on four corner posts and a central upright post about five feet high. In other cases it consists of a cleared space at the foot of a tree, and the roof of thatch is erected only at the times when sacrifices are offered. In some parts each departed headman is commemorated by a small stone which is placed in the shrine at the time of his death ceremonies, but in this area it is not possible to reckon the number of generations since the foundation of a village by the presence or absence of stones. Many of the villages have a history which extends back over more than six generations, and it appears that the stones which may have been placed in the past do not retain their sacredness over so long a period, and they have been removed. At the present time the immediate ancestors and also the original founder, revered as *Mąṅjhi haṛam*, are honoured by setting up the clay effigies of elephants or horses in their names. Even the site may be shifted under the influence of new ideas. Thus in the purely Santal village of Jamedia there is a shrine in the village street not far from the headman's house which has been in its present position for about fifteen years. The villagers referred to it as the *Mąṅjhi*

[1] Bodding, *Santali Dictionary*, Vol. III, p. 228.

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jaher rather than as the *Mañjhi than*. Until recently the shrine had been in another place beyond the present limits of the dwellings, and the villagers had found such a site very inconvenient. They were encouraged to change the site by the fact that in the street there grew an *arjun* tree, one of the sacred trees of Hinduism, and they felt they should do something to signalize its presence in the village. On a cleared space at the base of the tree there were two miniature wooden seats which were used by the spirits when they came, and there were also a clay horse and an elephant which had been in position there since the establishment of the shrine. The duty of tending these shrines, of sweeping the floor and plastering it with cowdung, falls upon an unmarried girl from the headman's house. The headman officiates as the priest at this shrine, presenting the offerings to his ancestors as the representative not only of the family but also of the living members of the village community. Offerings are made during the *Mokor*, the festival that closes the month of *Pus* in mid-January, and also during the Spring and Harvest festival seasons. Animals are sacrificed, but there is a significant difference in the methods of killing the animals offered in the sacred grove to the tribal spirits and those offered to the spirits of the ancestors. In the case of the former the animal is beheaded, but in the latter the animal is struck by a heavy implement on the back of the head so that the blood is not poured out. It does not seem possible to obtain any explanation of this from a Santal, apart from the all-embracing statement that "it is the custom". There is here another indication of the complexity of Santal religion; it would be difficult to fit all the facts into a scheme that seeks to find the origin of sacrifice in a single or simple cause.

The spirit world is not only the concern of the whole community or of each village but also of each family, a fact that finds embodiment in the cult surrounding the third sacred place of the Santals. This is a sacred enclosure inside each dwelling-house known as the *bhitar*, an Indo-Aryan word that means "within". This is formed by constructing a wall across the breadth of the main dwelling-house and so dividing the interior into two rooms with a mud partition between. The *bhitar* is the smaller of the two. The wall may be carried as high as the average height of a man, but often it is only about four feet high. The opening through which members of the family may pass from one room to the other is left vacant without a door. There are no sacred emblems kept in the *bhitar*,

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and in fact it is used extensively as a storeroom, particularly for stacking the bundles of reserve rice. Any man may pass through this opening, but no woman may do so unless she belongs to the family living there. The daughters of the house are debarred from going into the *bhitar* after they have married. After marriage a woman belongs to her husband's family, and this prohibition is one of several that are enforced with a view to ensuring that she shall not bring calamity on her husband's house by continuing to have dealings with the spirits of her father's home. She has to remove herself from their influence. Within the *bhitar* dwells the house spirit, and it is also visited by the ancestors of the family. There offerings of food and beer are made to the immediate ancestors. In certain instances sub-clan sacrifices are made in this inner room. The names of the spirits to whom the sub-clan sacrifices are made are kept secret. The knowledge of these names is handed down within each family from the father to the eldest son or other heir, and under no circumstances should it be imparted to others. An instance was reported of a man who was in deep distress because his father had died without his having had an opportunity of learning the name of the *abge*, as this spirit is called. He hoped to learn the name from one of his father's brothers, but this person also died before he could pass on the information. Shortly afterwards his dead uncle appeared to him in a dream and revealed the name, and he confirmed the correctness of the information by visiting yet another uncle who knew the secret. This story shows that the rules of silence are not too strictly observed within the family circle. Women are not allowed to learn the name, and in most cases they are excluded from participating in the sacrificial meal. The same prohibition applies to sons-in-law, though one of the Soren sub-clans is allowed to leave a portion of the food from the meal for their sons-in-law. When they summon them to eat, however, they address them as they would the household dogs, which emphasizes their separation from the family and from the sub-clan.

Some features of the Santal cult, as well as an indication of the ways in which it may develop, can be illustrated by a description of the shrine that stands on the outskirts of the village of Sarenga. This village was at first a Santal settlement, but it is now a place of nearly two thousand inhabitants, most of whom are Bengali Hindus. The present-day Santal inhabitants number barely one hundred, but amongst them are some who claim descent from the founders of the village, who lived,

so they say, nine generations ago.

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so they say, nine generations ago. One of the first settlers was one Lokhon Mañjhi. Just before he died he had been paying a visit to the *boŋga than*, probably the sacred grove of that day. It occupied a site that is now taken by the landlord's rent-collecting office and has quite disappeared. He returned home, sat down on his string bed to have a smoke, then suddenly fell over and died. Almost immediately, and before the news of Lokhon's death had passed through the village, a young man in the courtyard of a house belonging to Lokhon's paternal aunt became possessed. He announced to the assembled company that he was Lokhon and that they must make a sacred place for him. They chose an old banyan tree to the north of the village. This tree has long since disappeared, but its place has been taken by an *atuak'* tree, which serves equally well. The fact that the village has become largely non-Santal means that the sanctity of this particular shrine is recognized by people belonging to many different castes, and its reputation has grown with the years. All the offerings there are made by the Santal priest in the village, a man who is descended from Lokhon. He is also the local Santal headman and combines the two offices in one person; such an arrangement is not unique and seems to have been adopted often in places where the Santals are living surrounded by other communities. He and his predecessors have adapted themselves to the new situation, and so this shrine, now utilized by many non-Santals, is still served by a Santal priest. Every market day people from the surrounding villages come to offer sacrifices, to ask a boon, or to leave their thank-offerings of money for blessings that have been granted. Some of the more unscrupulous of the local inhabitants defy the spirits by hanging around and picking up the coins left by the devout.

At the base of the tree is the shrine, formed by a raised earthen mound on which there are many burnt clay effigies of horses and elephants. In front of the mound a narrow path has been cleared for about eight feet, so that the tree is approached from the west, the direction in which all the effigies are facing. This path has been cleared through a jumbled heap of innumerable small clay animal effigies that have been left at the shrine by devotees in the past in the performance of their vows. Here there were many opportunities for watching the priest at work, and the chief impression that stands out is the dignity and reverence with which he performed his tasks. On a particular Thursday in 1941 he first of all cleared a small space at

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the base of the earthen mound and smeared it with his mixture of cowdung and water. He then took some vermilion paint from a leaf and mixed it with mustard oil in a small brass cup that he had brought for the purpose. This mixture he proceeded to smear on the foreheads of the larger animal effigies, and in doing so he used only the middle finger of his right hand. He then sprinkled some water over the effigies, and followed this by sprinkling some spice, of a variety known as *mithu*.[1] Up to this point all his actions had been performed in complete silence, and he was being watched intently by a small group of people who were waiting to make their offerings. He used the utmost deliberation and completed each part of the proceeding with great reverence. He next took up in his right hand a twig of the *sinjo*[2] tree and passed it in an anti-clockwise direction over the space that had been smeared with cowdung and laid it at the foot of the mound. Then he did an obeisance, bringing his right hand up to his forehead with the fingers lightly clenched, while the fingers of his left hand rested against his right forearm, the customary Santal salutation by an adult to his respected seniors. The process was repeated three times with three separate twigs, and as each twig was moved around he muttered his prayer. When it was over he told me that one had been for *Cando*, one for *Marak Buru*, and one for Lokhon Mañjhi.

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All was then ready for the offerings, of which on that particular day there were three. The first was a pigeon that had been brought by the mother of a sick child. He accepted it from the mother, taking hold of it by his right hand and taking care—he was squatting on the ground—not to turn his back on the shrine. He smeared the head of the pigeon with vermilion and oil, sprinkled it with some of the *mithu*, and then held it to feed on a little parched rice that he had placed on a leaf on the smeared space. He then handed the pigeon back to the woman who had brought it. The same process was repeated with a black hen and a small black goat that belonged to others who had been waiting. As each of them took back the dedicated animals they paid a small money fee to the priest, this varying from one to four pice. He then placed his sacrificial axe on the ground to his left with the sharp edge uppermost. This axe, known as the *tangi*, has a curved blade. He took hold of the pigeon once more and severed its head by passing it swiftly

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[1] *Trigonella Foenum-graecum*, Willd.
[2] The Bengali *Bel*, Aegle Marmelos, *Correa*.

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across the axe edge, then held it so that the blood should pour on to the parched rice, after which he flung away the body of the pigeon with his left hand and placed the severed head with the parched rice. The hen was sacrificed in exactly the same way. He then rose to his feet for the sacrifice of the goat. This was of necessity a more elaborate proceeding. A little way off from the shrine, to the south-west, there stood a "killing-post" with a cleft at its upper end. The goat's neck was forced into this cleft, and it was secured with rope. Its owner held the goat firmly, clasping its front legs and securing them by drawing them up and backward over the goat's back, and the priest severed the head with one quick stroke of the axe. Immediately and with great speed he took hold of both the head and the body, so that the blood might drop on to the parched rice. This completed the offerings for the day, and he gathered up the heads of the animals and his other possessions and took them away in a small basket.

This Sarenga shrine affords a good example of the way in which Hinduism can take over the customs and use the beliefs of those who are not, strictly speaking, within the fold, but in spite of the eclecticism here apparent there is a point beyond which the Santals of the village will not go in accommodating themselves to Hindu society. The *Mokor* festival at the end of *Pus* is celebrated by all the lower Hindu castes of the area as well as by the Santals, and at Sarenga it is accompanied by a gathering near this shrine, when many different people, including the Santals, take part in the stick dancing. On the other hand, in 1930 a proposal made by the local Hindus of influence roused great indignation and had to be abandoned. A Santal couple from the village who had previously been baptized were persuaded, as a result of a mission by an agent of the Arya Samaj, to renounce the Christian faith. It was proposed that they should undergo the *suddhi*, or purification ceremony, at the hands of the Arya missionary at Lokhon Mañjhi's shrine. The Santals immediately announced that they would not recognize the validity of any such ceremony and that if it took place at their shrine they would cut down the tree and desecrate the shrine with their own hands. Many beliefs have grown up around the place. Binu of Tantidanga used to say that there were certainly times when the animals moved; he himself had twice seen them do so at the time of the *Pus* festival. He used to relate the local legend of how when Europeans had first tried to live at Sarenga they found

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it impossible to build a house. They were indigo planters, whose compound lay to the south of the shrine. Every time they tried to build the walls would crack, so in the end they offered a libation of their spirits to Lokhon Mañjhi and all was well. In recent times a Bengali Christian has built himself a house between the old indigo compound, now the mission compound, and the shrine without so far having suffered any dire consequences, but Binu would stoutly affirm that he makes offering to Lokhon in secret!

The main intention of the Santal cult of sacrifice is to ensure the stability of the society and the wellbeing of its members. The usual burden of the prayers and invocations, the *bakhet*, is to threaten or cajole the spirits so that sickness may be kept away from the village and that the rains may not fail. The example of a prayer that has been quoted[1] throws light on the attitude of the worshipper and the language that he uses. The prayer is the accompaniment of certain material offerings, and a strong hope is expressed that *Marañ Buru* will find the gifts adequate; there is, in fact, more than a suggestion that he ought to find them sufficient and do his duty in return. While material benefits are mainly sought,[2] this particular example reveals that Santal worshippers do sometimes look beyond the needs of the moment, for it is a prayer for a blessing of long life and happiness to be bestowed on a newly married couple. The language of the prayers is rhythmical; doublet words with rhyming endings and frequent repetition convey to the ear an effect similar to that given by rhymed verse. Often the prayers are spoken in colloquial Bengali, though the language in this case is Santali. The words themselves are not conceived of as "magical" in the sense that any alteration in their form or the omission of particular words would nullify the efficacy of the formula. There is obviously an element of magic in the ritual employed in sacrificing, but the prayers are uttered as accompaniment to the actions in order to draw the attention of the spirits to the latter. Most often the one who is uttering the prayer uses a loud and threatening tone of voice.

There is no individual approach to the *boñgas*. Fellowship with them is maintained through sacrifices that are offered on

[1] See p. 67 above.

[2] Cf. E. O. James, *Comparative Religion*, 1938, p. 278: "In a primitive agricultural community requests for ethical and moral virtues could hardly be expected, since, as Cicero remarks, 'men call Jupiter greatest and best because he makes us not just or temperate or wise, but sound and healthy and rich and wealthy'." The citation is from *De Nat. Deorum*, III, 36, 87.

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His feet are washed in each house and he receives presents of grain and beer. The subsequent merrymaking dies down during the night. The celebration is completed on the following day, when the co-priest offers drops of his own blood to the boundary spirits.

The following account of the Spring festival held in Barikul in 1939 was recorded by Babulal at the time, and it conveys, as no outside account could, the atmosphere of the festival. He begins:

"*March 17.* Today is the bathing day for the Flower festival. Early in the morning the bailiff called everyone to make the booths ready in the sacred grove. The women were busy boiling their clothes. One young man from every house took part in the thatching of the booths; some brought *sarjom* branches from the jungle, and others made small wooden seats for the spirits. The priest washed all the things for the spirits' house—the bangles, the necklace, a bow and arrow, an axe, also basket, broom, bells and horns—and he brought back to his house an earthen pot of water for luck. The place of sacrifice was smeared with cowdung, and oil and vermilion were placed there in readiness. When the young men had finished the thatching they bathed, and then said to the bailiff: 'We go now to Sonadungri for the flower hunt; see that the drums beat and the horns sound at the foot of the banyan tree, for when we hear them we shall start. Do not delay, for we want to begin.' The bailiff completed his bath quickly, and taking four youths with the drums and the horns to the banyan tree by the stone fence he did as he had been requested. And so the youths went out hunting. They caught fourteen hares, thirteen jungle fowl, four partridges and ten squirrels. These they brought home hanging from a pole which was slung from the shoulders of two men. When they arrived back at the side of the large tank, the spoils were divided, and some we gave to the men of neighbouring villages who had joined in the hunt. The flesh was roasted and divided; some was given to the killers, some to the dogs, some to the villagers, and a special portion to the widows.

In the evening the bailiff called everyone to gather for the 'spirit possession'. We took three new winnowing fans and all collected at the priest's house. Three men were possessed, and each of them took hold of a winnowing fan. They were seated facing the east, and the priest put sun-dried rice on to the winnowing fan of *Marak Buru*. Immediately to his left sat *Manjhi*

[i.e. the priest.-Ed/pt]

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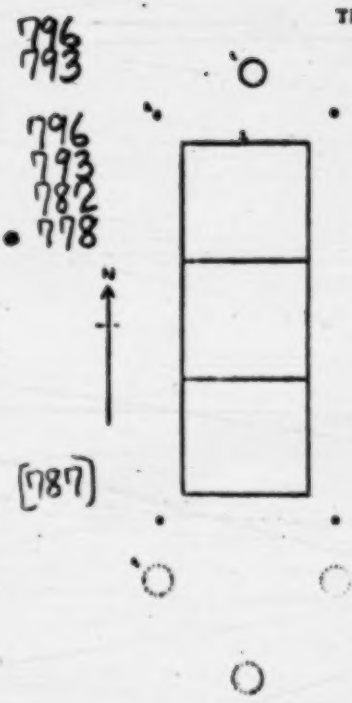

brass water-pot, while his wife carried the earthen pot of water brought for good fortune. Youths and maidens conducted him to the grove, dancing as they went, and there he began to make the sacrifice. The youths and the maidens danced in the grove, the young men singing only the Flower dance songs, and while the dancing went on the priest proceeded with his work. With the flour he made the circles and the squares. A hen was offered in each of the circles; the brown hen was slain in the Moslem[1] fashion, while the other two had their necks cut. Again each of the spirits took possession of a man, and they sucked the blood of the slain birds. One circle was for *Marak Burn*, one for the Old Lady of the Grove, and one for *Mañjhi haram*. In the squares the priest sacrificed to the village spirits, and as we had brought many hens it was not possible to offer them all, so some were killed by knocking their heads on the ground. When it was all over, the priest cooked the heads of the first three hens with flour, making cakes of them, and then ate them and drank beer. This is called 'lifting the head'. Then the folk in the village who offer to the 'Five' took flowers from the trees of the grove, returned to their own houses and made mounds of the flowers. Near these mounds they offered either hens or goats. (Some of those who worship the 'Five' invite all their relatives at this time and make the sacrifice in the grove.) Meanwhile the priest drank beer and cooked a hash of rice with the brown hen.

796 793 787 Late in the afternoon the young men went to receive the priest back into the village. They went dancing to the grove and danced round the priest. Again the spirits took possession of the three young men, who danced with the others. The Old Lady again wore the bangles and the necklace and carried the

[1] This is Babulal's word. The offering to *Mañjhi haram* is strangled and not beheaded.

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CHAPTER 10

BIRTH AND INITIATION

858 The birth of a child is an occasion for rejoicing, and the event is announced by saying: "The new relation has arrived." Children are spoken of as the gift of *Cando*, which indicates that they are considered to be assets to the family. It is true that boys are rather more welcome than girls; every family desires that the first child should be a boy who will ensure the survival of that [428] particular family within the clan. A boy can inherit his father's lands, and one day he will be required to assist at his father's funeral ceremonies and perpetuate the worship of his own ancestors. Girls are welcomed, though not to the same degree. Through their marriages they will in due course extend the range of the family's relationships, but they bring but a small economic return to their parents, and the bride price received at marriage is not comparable to the expense of bringing them to maturity. Where a family consists of both boys and girls in equal proportion the girls are well treated, and when later on they go to other homes their places will be filled by daughters-in-law. When, on the other hand, a woman gives birth to a succession of daughters she is likely to feel the displeasure of her husband's relations. A third or fourth daughter born into a home where the husband's mother reigns supreme does not enjoy much prospect of survival. Children are valued from the first because of their potential working ability. A villager, on hearing that a birth has taken place, responds at once with the question: "What is it? Does it carry on the shoulder (a boy) or does it carry on the head (a girl)?" Or he may say: "Is it a hunter or is it a water carrier?"[1]

842 There are Hindu shrines in the area to which Santal women resort along with others when other means of securing the birth [978] of a longed-for child have proved of no avail. A spirit who can [976] grant the boon of children resides near the village of Raniband at the summit of a hill which rises abruptly from the plain and [982] is the highest point in the whole area. Cases have been reported of Santal man and wife making the climb together in order to [595] present an offering. In most cases, however, the husband preserves an air of indifference; if his wife fails to bear a child he is

[1] Another way of referring to the sex of children, though not at the time of birth, is for a parent to say: "I have three *ipi* and three *erha*", which signifies three boys and three girls. *Ipi* is a cultivated millet (*Panicum crusgalli*, L.) and *erha* is a cultivated grain (*Setaria italica*, Kunth).

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TRIBAL HERITAGE

The most important cause of tension is the acceptance of a theology—a new myth, as it may be called—that results in a new ordering of religious activities and social obligations. The shadowy figure of the Supreme Being is invested with personality and comes into the centre of consciousness. He is not merely the Creator to whom little is ascribed except a vague reference as the dispenser of good and bad weather; He is vitally concerned with human conduct. The stories of Genesis are grafted on to conceptions that are already held and affect the latter. The story of the Jews is appreciated as that of a people who suffered through a long history from oppression, and the story of the wanderings appeals to the Santal. It is altogether fitting that the One Saviour of all mankind should be born of a people with whom the Santal feels that he has much in common. The traditional story of the origin of mankind is held to supplement the biblical narrative. In preaching, the Santal constantly refers to Adam and Eve as *Pilcu Haṛam* and *Pilcu Budhi*; *Maraṅ Buru*, on the other hand, is equated with Satan, and the cult of worship that he instituted is regarded as a deception imposed on the Santals. To the Santal who has been led in any degree to appreciate the Christian teaching about God, the identification of *Maraṅ Buru* with Satan seems to be obvious. He led the first human pair into sin and revealed to them the secret of sexual intercourse, for which the polite name among the Santals is always *baṛic' kami*, or evil work. He caused their ancestors to wander through the forests and finally foisted on them the cult of the spirits centring in the worship of himself. It follows that there are certain things which a Christian may not do. They are cut off from any activity that savours of worship of the tribal spirits. They do not contribute in cash or in kind to the offerings associated with the village festivals. This in turn excludes them from the communal rejoicing, the dancing and the feasting which take place during the festivals. At such times they are frequently the only sober persons in the village. It is impossible to live in a village at the time of the great Spring and Harvest festivals without becoming acutely aware of the gulf which divides the Christians from their neighbours, and without realizing that the Christians are themselves deeply conscious of the gulf. The same is true of the clan sacrifices; but it is interesting to observe that rules of behaviour which are linked with the mythology of the clans still regulate the conduct of the village Christian to a very large extent. A Murmu who has a clan taboo against building a house with four sloping sides to the roof continues to live in the style of house